Friday

Ed Brubaker
Marcos Martin
Muntsa Vicente

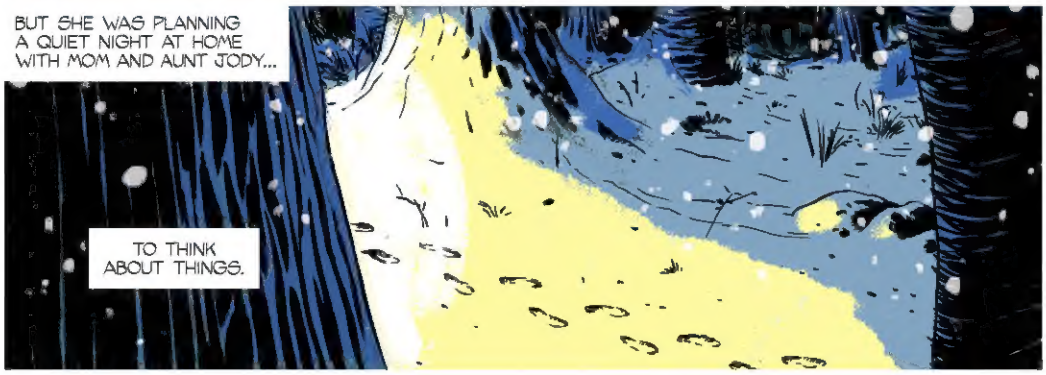
Chapter One

The Girl in the Trees

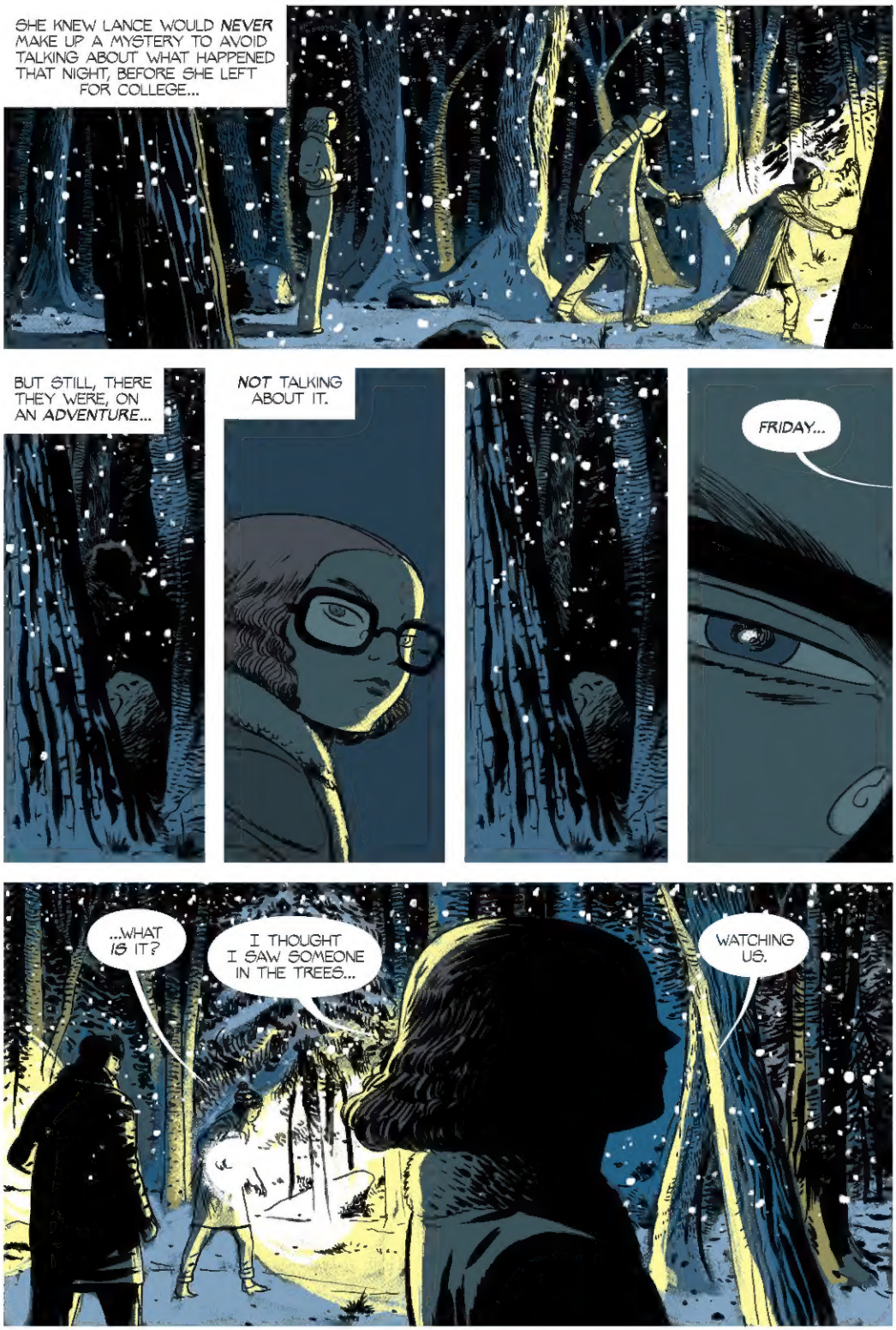
FRIDAY FITZHUGH HAD ONLY BEEN BACK IN *KINGS HILL* FOR HALF AN HOUR...

AND ALREADY IT WAS LIKE SHE NEVER LEFT.

SHE SHOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTING THIS, OF COURSE...

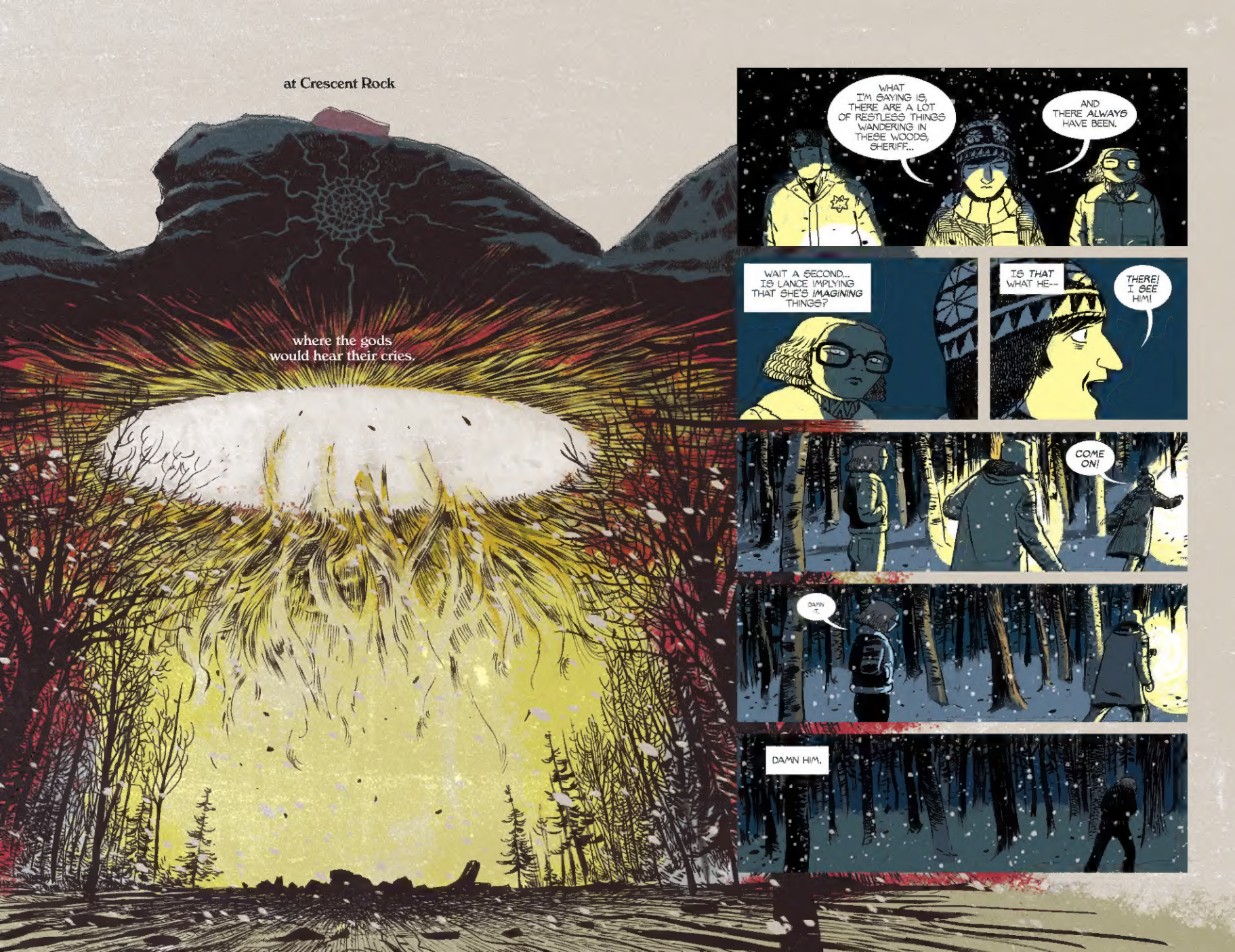

BUT SHE WAS PLANNING A QUIET NIGHT AT HOME WITH MOM AND AUNT JODY...
TO THINK ABOUT THINGS.

BUT INSTEAD, JUST LIKE A THOUSAND NIGHTS BEFORE, SHE WAS TRUDGING THROUGH THE KINGSWOOD FOREST TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH *LANCELOT JONES*.
WE'RE GETTING CLOSE NOW... THE TRACKS LOOK FRESHER.
LIKE HER LIFE WAS A RECORD NEEDLE STUCK IN AN ENDLESS GROOVE.
WE CAN STILL CATCH HIM...


SHE KNEW LANCE WOULD *NEVER* MAKE UP A MYSTERY TO AVOID TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT, BEFORE SHE LEFT FOR COLLEGE...
BUT STILL, THERE THEY WERE, ON AN *ADVENTURE*...
NOT TALKING ABOUT IT.
FRIDAY...
...WHAT *IS* IT?
I THOUGHT I SAW SOMEONE IN THE TREES...
WATCHING US.

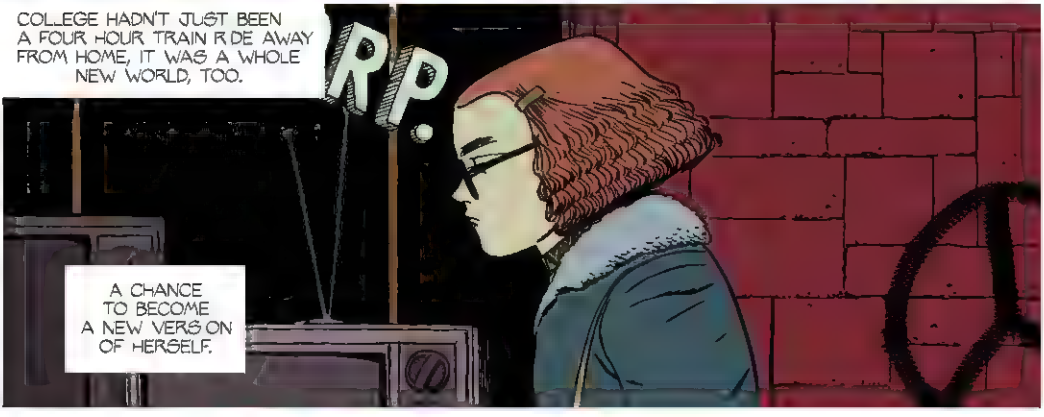
SOMEONE OR SOMETHING?
NO. IT WAS A PERSON...
OR PERSON-SHAPED, AT LEAST.
I THOUGHT MAYBE A GIRL.
ARE YOU SURE?
NO. I JUST SAW IT FOR A SECOND.
OKAY...
LET'S KEEP MOVING...

WE'RE NOT FAR FROM CRESCENT ROCK, YOU KNOW...
I KNOW.
WHY DOES THAT MATTER?
CRESCENT ROCK IS PART OF THE LOCAL LORE, SHERIFF...
In the dark times of long long ago, on midwinter nights the women who lived in the forest would trek through sleet and snow
to sacrifice the weakest of their offspring to ancient gods.
An offering to ensure the arrival of a new spring, a new year.
They left their children howling into the cold night


at Crescent Rock
where the gods would hear their cries.
WHAT I'M SAYING IS, THERE ARE A LOT OF RESTLESS THINGS WANDERING IN THESE WOODS, SHERIFF...
AND THERE ALWAYS HAVE BEEN.
WAIT A SECOND... IS LANCE IMPLYING THAT SHE'S IMAGINING THINGS?
IS THAT WHAT HE--
THERE! I SEE HIM!
COME ON!
DAMN IT.
DAMN HIM.

SHE'D SPENT THE WHOLE TRAIN RIDE HOME TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT SHE WAS GOING TO SAY... IT WAS RIDICULOUS.
THEY'D BEEN BEST FRIENDS SINCE THEY WERE KIDS, AND NOW SHE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO HIM.
THE FEW TIMES SHE'D PHONED FROM COLLEGE, HE JUST WANTED TO UPDATE HER ON WHATEVER HE WAS *INVESTIGATING*...
...POOR KID WAS *MISSING* FOR THREE DAYS. WE FOUND HIM DOWN IN THE OLD SEWER TUNNELS.
...AND SHE HADN'T FOUND THE NERVE TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT.
HE WAS IN SOME SORT OF *HALF-CATATONIC* STATE... THEY'RE NOT SURE *WHY* YET.
OH... THAT'S CRAZY...
BABE, WE GOTTA *SPLIT*. WE'RE GONNA MISS THE MOVIE.
BUT NOW THAT SHE WAS HOME FOR CHRISTMAS, THERE WOULD BE NO AVOIDING IT.
THEY COULDN'T PRETEND THAT NIGHT HAD NEVER HAPPENED WHEN THEY WERE FACE-TO-FACE AGAIN...
COULD THEY?
WELCOME TO KINGS HILL

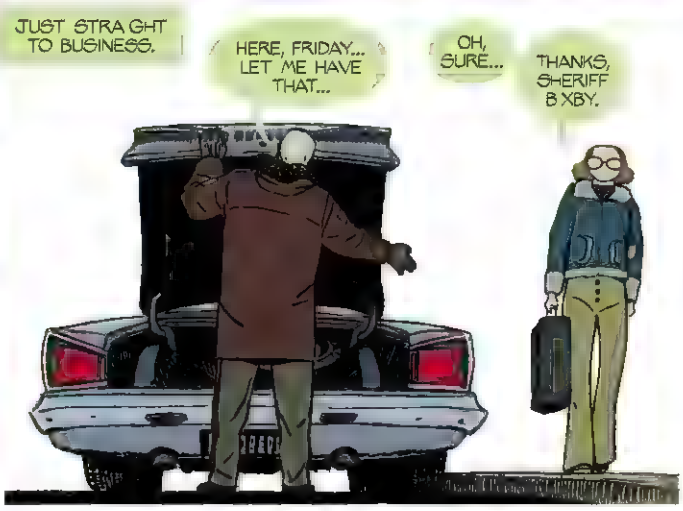
WALKING HOME FROM THE TRAIN STATION, *KINGS HILL* FELT STRANGE AND LONELY AND SMALL, IN A WAY IT NEVER HAD BEFORE...
EVEN AFTER THEY CAME BACK FROM TRIPS TO BOSTON OR NEW YORK.
ZALE

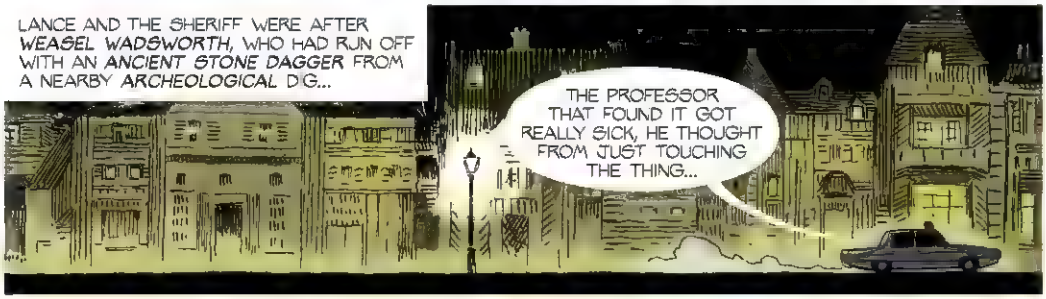

COLLEGE HADN'T JUST BEEN A FOUR HOUR TRAIN RIDE AWAY FROM HOME, IT WAS A WHOLE NEW WORLD, TOO.
A CHANCE TO BECOME A NEW VERSION OF HERSELF.

TO BE INDEPENDENT.
THERE YOU ARE!

YOUR TRAIN WAS EARLY.
HOP N... WE'RE ON A CASE.
FISH

NOT EVEN A HEL..O... TYPICAL LANCELOT JONES.


JUST STRAIGHT TO BUSINESS.
HERE, FRIDAY... LET ME HAVE THAT...
OH, SURE...
THANKS, SHERIFF BIXBY.


LANCE AND THE SHERIFF WERE AFTER WEASEL WADSWORTH, WHO HAD RUN OFF WITH AN ANCIENT STONE DAGGER FROM A NEARBY ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG...
THE PROFESSOR THAT FOUND IT GOT REALLY SICK, HE THOUGHT FROM JUST TOUCHING THE THING...

BUT WEASEL SEEMS TO HAVE LOST HIS MIND... OR MAYBE HE'S POSSESSED...
HARD TO SAY, REALLY, UNTIL WE CATCH HIM...
IT WAS SO EASY TO DROP BACK INTO THIS ROLE, LANCE'S MYSTERY-HUNTING PARTNER.
AND SHE COULDN'T DENY SHE FELT THAT SAME TINGLE DEEP INSIDE...
OR THAT HER HEART WAS BEATING A LITTLE FASTER...
SHERIFF LOOK! ON THE RIGHT!
BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE NOW, TOO, SOMETHING SAD.
LIKE HOLDING HANDS WITH SOMEONE YOU BROKE UP WITH.
THAT'S WEASEL'S CAR!
I'VE GOT HIS TRAIL...
WE CAN'T BE FAR BEHIND HIM.

CAREFUL.
FLASHLIGHTS OFF.
DO YOU SEE THAT?
YEAH... WHAT'S HE DOING?
LOOKS LIKE HE'S TRYING TO CARVE SOMETHING...
BUT I CAN'T MAKE IT OUT FROM HERE.

SHOULD WE LET HIM FINISH?
I DON'T THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA...
OKAY... I'LL HANDLE HIM...
ICE-BALL?
YOU READ MY MIND.
FRIDAY'S CLASSIC ICE-BALL.
OUTSIDE LAYER: ICE AND SNOW, ROUGHLY ONE INCH THICK
CENTER: BIGGEST ROCK YOU CAN FIND
...THE WHITE LADY... HER CHILDREN... WILL FIND HER... THE WHITE... THE LADY...
HEY... WEASEL!

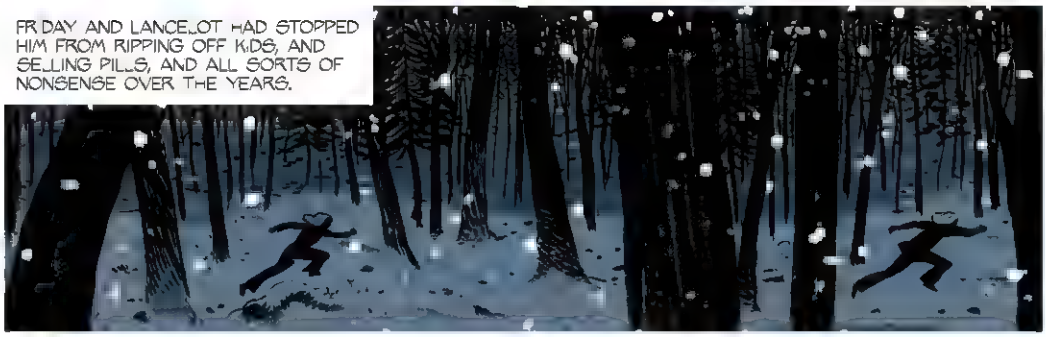
GRRAAAARRR--!!
THINK FAST, SHITHEAD!
WHPPP
NAA--!
GET THE KNIFE!

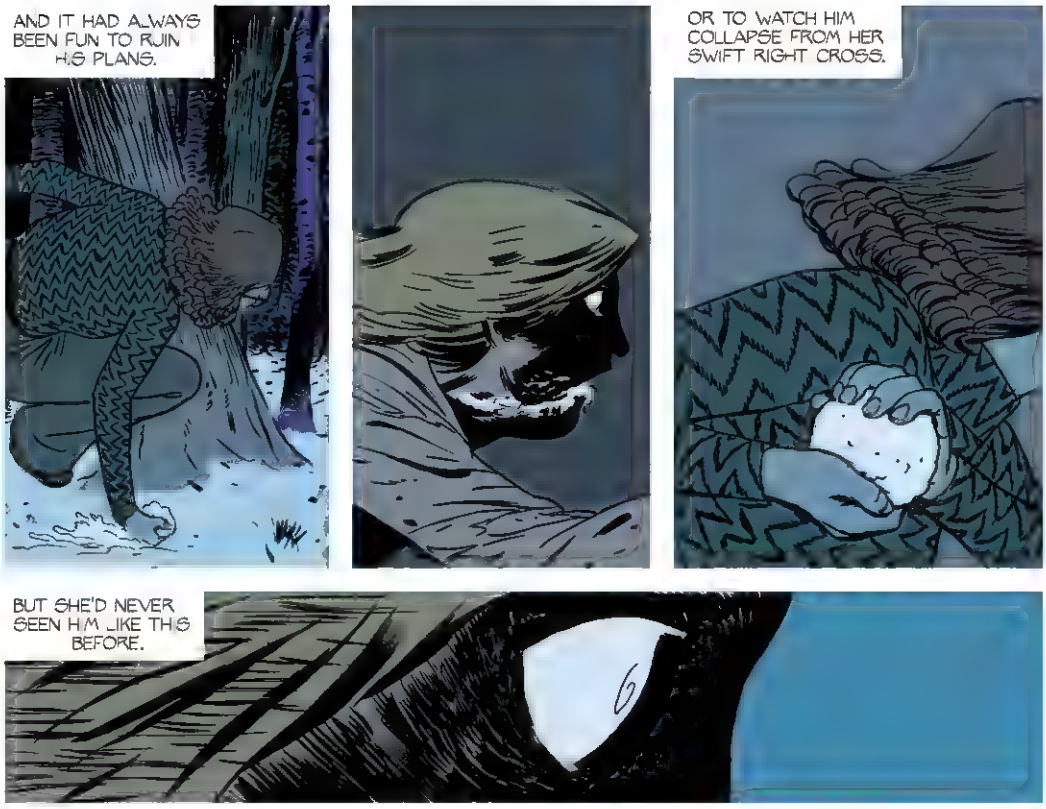
DON'T LET IT TOUCH YOUR SKIN.
I WON'T...
NOOO!!
WEASEL... JUST CALM DOWN, MAN...
FAAAH--!
SHIT!

FRIDAY...
I KNOW.
I'M ON HIM.

DON'T WORRY.

WILSON "WEASEL" WADSWORTH WAS THE SON OF THE RICHEST MAN IN KINGS HILL, AND HE USUALLY ACTED LIKE HE OWNED THE WHOLE TOWN.


FRIDAY AND LANCELOT HAD STOPPED HIM FROM RIPPING OFF KIDS, AND SELLING PILLS, AND ALL SORTS OF NONSENSE OVER THE YEARS.


AND IT HAD ALWAYS BEEN FUN TO RUIN HIS PLANS.
OR TO WATCH HIM COLLAPSE FROM HER SWIFT RIGHT CROSS.
BUT SHE'D NEVER SEEN HIM LIKE THIS BEFORE.

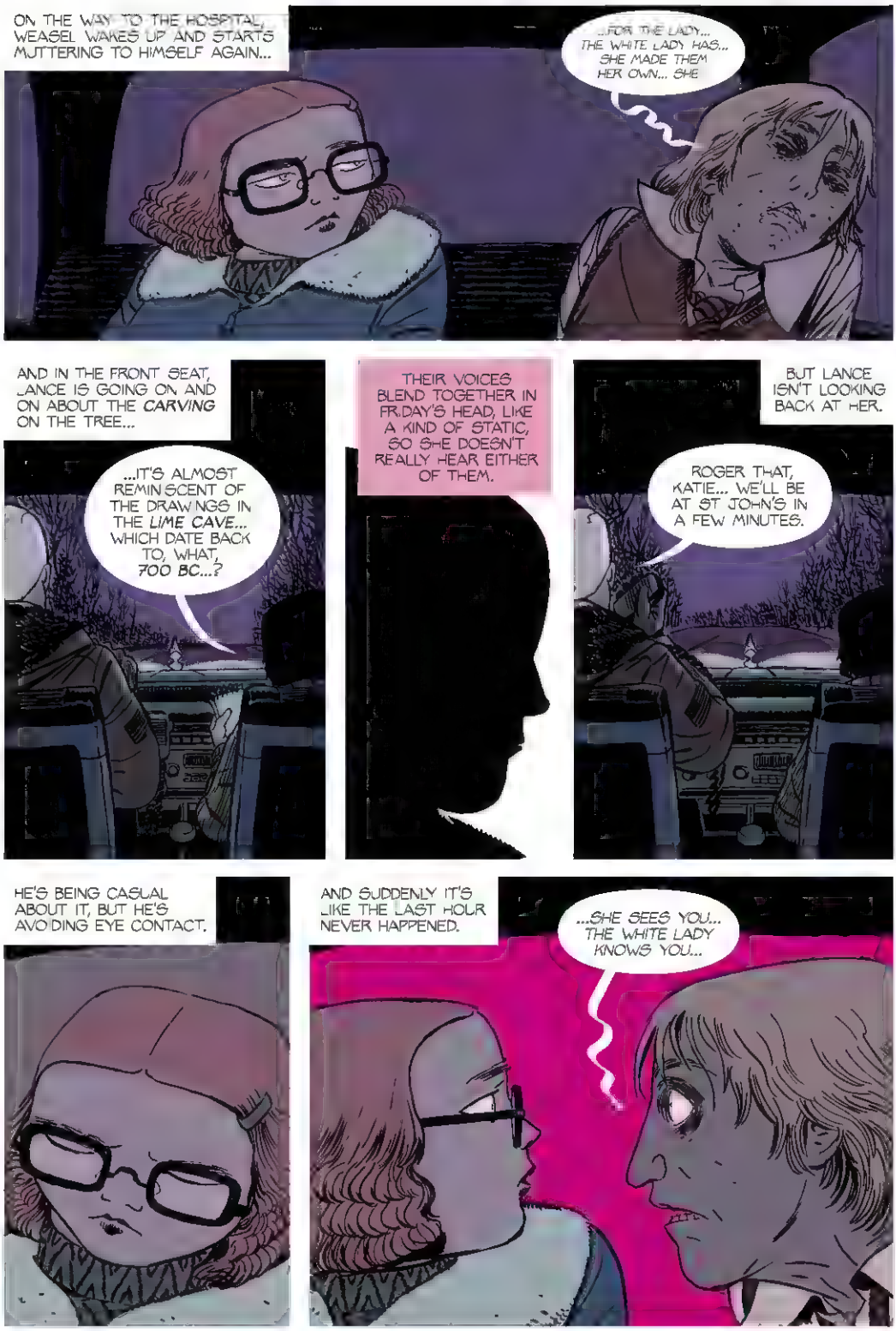
THIS WASN'T FUN.

KRAAAAAK
!!

SHE WASN'T EVEN SURE WEASEL WAS STILL IN THERE.
...HHH...

...THE WHITE LADY... WANTS... HER...

...CHHUU...


ON THE WAY TO THE HOSPITAL, WEASEL WAKES UP AND STARTS MUTTERING TO HIMSELF AGAIN...
...FOR THE LADY... THE WHITE LADY HAS... SHE MADE THEM HER OWN... SHE
AND IN THE FRONT SEAT, LANCE IS GOING ON AND ON ABOUT THE CARVING ON THE TREE...
...IT'S ALMOST REMINISCENT OF THE DRAWINGS IN THE LIME CAVE... WHICH DATE BACK TO, WHAT, 700 BC...?
THEIR VOICES BLEND TOGETHER IN FRIDAY'S HEAD, LIKE A KIND OF STATIC, SO SHE DOESN'T REALLY HEAR EITHER OF THEM.
BUT LANCE ISN'T LOOKING BACK AT HER.
ROGER THAT, KATIE... WE'LL BE AT ST JOHN'S IN A FEW MINUTES.
HE'S BEING CASUAL ABOUT IT, BUT HE'S AVOIDING EYE CONTACT.
AND SUDDENLY IT'S LIKE THE LAST HOUR NEVER HAPPENED.
...SHE SEES YOU... THE WHITE LADY KNOWS YOU...

SHE'S RIGHT BACK TO THAT SICK FEELING IN HER STOMACH.
ENCY ENTRANCE

THE HELL WITH THIS, THEY NEED TO TALK... EVEN IF SHE'S FUCKING EXHAUSTED.
HEY...

HEY- ARE YOU OKAY FINDING YOUR OWN WAY HOME, FRIDAY?
WHAT?

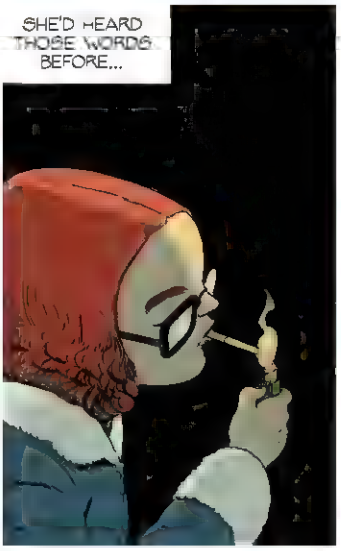
WE'RE GOING BACK OUT THERE, TO GET SOME PICTURES OF WHAT WEASEL DREW ON THAT TREE.
RIGHT NOW?

I WAS HOPING WE COULD... UH...

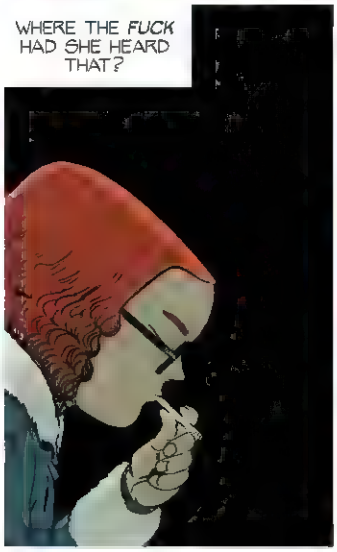
HERE YOU GO.
LOOK, I'LL COME BY AND SEE YOU IN THE MORNING...
I NEED TO SHOW YOU WHAT I'VE BEEN WORKING ON.
SURE... OKAY...
WELL... SHIT...
HEY MOM, CAN YOU COME PICK ME UP? I'M AT THE HOSPITAL.
NO, I'M OKAY- SORRY... NO, I JUST GOT WAYLAID ON THE WAY HOME FROM THE TRAIN.

EMERGENC

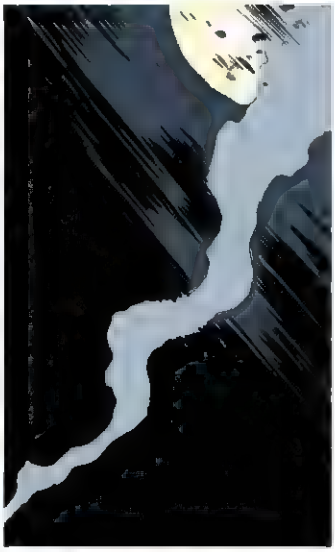
THE WHITE LADY.


SHE'D HEARD THOSE WORDS BEFORE...

AND NOW IT WAS REALLY BUGGING HER.


WHERE THE *FUCK* HAD SHE HEARD THAT?

DAMN T, LANCE...



End of
Chapter One

SO WHERE DID THIS BOOK COME FROM...?

The short answer is that FRIDAY exists because last summer Marcos wrote to ask if I wanted to write something for him and I thought about it for maybe one minute and then wrote back with the basic pitch for this book, which seemingly came to me in one quick burst of inspiration, as I was trying to picture what I most wanted to see Marcos Martin draw next.

But the long answer is more complicated. Because FRIDAY is something that's been building in the back of my mind for probably half my life, that I was starting to think I'd never actually get to write. From the time I was 25 or so, I had this vague dream of writing a book like this... Something that felt gothic but grounded, like a post-YA book, where the kids that solved mysteries and confronted ghosts and monsters also grew up and had the same problems we all do, the same struggles, and bad habits.

See, when I was young and barely scraping by as a cartoonist, I lived around the corner from a Public Library and when I'd get depressed, I'd go over and dig through their young adult section. It started because I saw a stack of **Great Brain** books waiting to be reshelved. I remembered them from when I was like 10 or 11, so I checked them all out and read them in two days, and it was like a time machine. After that, for about a year I was checking out books like that all the time - **Encyclopedia Brown**, **The Egypt Game**, Roald Dahl books, a bunch of the John Bellairs series like **The House with the Clock in its Walls**, or Daniel Pinkwater's **The Snarkout Boys**, and my favorite YA book of all time, **Harriet the Spy**. It was a great way to escape, being entertained by great writers and wrapped in the warmth of childhood nostalgia at the same time.

At some point I drifted down to the mystery section and started rereading Jim Thompson books and Raymond Chandler, and that stuff spoke to me too, obviously, and led me to pursuing a whole other career... but that year of reading and rereading those 60s and 70s YA novels always stuck in the back of my mind.

Sometimes I'd jot down notes - trying to blend Lovecraft's New England and Edward Gorey's, playing with fairy tales and occult conspiracy theories - but nothing ever came of it. I was busy writing crime comics and superhero comics that were sort of like crime comics, and somehow building a side career as a YA (or post-YA) novelist just seemed like one of those "if only I'd taken a different path" kind of things. Here I was buried in deadlines, dreaming of this other life where I sat by a fire with a notebook, writing the continuing adventures of some teen detectives in the timeless 1970s of my youth. It was never going to happen.

But then I got Marcos's email and it all fell together.

I knew the look and the mood this story had to have, and here was the perfect artist to bring it all to life, and someone who was one of my favorite storytellers, on top of it. And suddenly all those years of circling what this project might be paid off, because when I saw Marcos's sketches of Friday, I knew exactly who she was, and what her story would be. And we've barely scratched the surface of it so far. I can't wait for you all to read the next few chapters. We're obviously playing with classic young adult archetypes here – Friday's last name is even a nod to the author of **Harriet the Spy** - but what we're doing with them is very post-YA, as you'll see soon.

Side note – a friend informs me that "post-YA" is just A, but I think you know what I mean.

Anyway, we've been working on this book for a long time already, with Marcos agonizing over every detail from character designs to the town of Kings Hill itself (which was not intentionally named after Stephen King and Joe Hill, I swear) and Muntsa experimenting to find the mood of the story with her colors so beautifully... but we had no idea when we finally put it out we'd be in the midst of a global pandemic. And to be honest, for the last month or so working on this book has been one of the things that's kept me sane... So I hope that Friday's story gives you at least some brief escape from the real world right now, and that you come back for the next chapter, to find out just what the hell happened with Friday and Lance on the night before she left for college.

In the meantime, remember you can send us your messages directly if/when you decide to make a payment and you can also write to us at: FridayFitzhugh@gmail.com and tell us what your favorite YA books were when you were growing up. And please suggest some names for this letters page. The winning title will get a prize.

Ed Brubaker

April 15th, 2020

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